

(Letter from the Prelate: February 2011)

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

With great joy, as countless sons and daughters of the Church and so many other people all over the world have done, we received the news of the upcoming beatification of the Servant of God John Paul II, on the 1st of May. This date, the liturgical memorial of St. Joseph the Worker, falls this year on the Second Sunday of Easter, dedicated to Divine Mercy, to which that unforgettable Pontiff had such a deep devotion.

The thought occurred to me that the best way to give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for this new gift to the Church and to mankind could be summed up in taking up with new eagerness, filled with joy, the path of sanctification in the ordinary circumstances of life. This is the path that we learned from St. Josemaría and that John Paul II, in his apostolic letter dedicated to the new millennium, pointed to as the principal challenge confronting all Christians without exception. “This ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual . . . The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction.”¹ And he said the same thing in the Bull of Canonization for our Father, defining him as “the saint of ordinary life.”²

The liturgy echoes this urgent need in the upcoming Sundays of Ordinary Time, in which we read chapter five of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Two days ago, the passage of the beatitudes that begins the Sermon on the Mount was read, and on the following Sundays we will hear the consequences of that call to sanctity. Our Lord explains to all his listeners how his teaching leads to the fullness of the Law that God had entrusted to Moses on Mount Sinai. At the end of the chapter, he sums up his teachings with these words: *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*³

Without Christ, we would never be able to aspire to this goal: *apart from me you can do nothing*,⁴ he tells us in St. John’s Gospel. And each of us has to freely respond, opening ourselves to the grace of the Holy Spirit that reaches us especially through the sacraments, through the sensible signs that God in his goodness and wisdom has instituted to draw close to his creatures. “God is not a remote God, too distant or too great to be bothered with our trifles,” said Benedict XVI. “Since he is great, he can also be concerned about small things. Since he is great, the soul of man, man himself, created through eternal love, is not a small thing but great, and worthy of God’s love.”⁵ And making reference to the reactions of fear in the face of God’s holiness that are found in the Old Testament, the Pope added that, since the Messiah came into the world, “God’s

¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 31.

² John Paul II, *Litterae Decretales* for the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, October 6, 2002.

³ *Mt* 5:48.

⁴ *Jn* 15:5.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass *In Cena Domini*, April 13, 2006.

holiness is not merely an incandescent power before which we are obliged to withdraw, terrified. It is a power of love and therefore a purifying and healing power.”⁶

The feast of the Purification of Our Lady, which we celebrate tomorrow on February 2nd together with the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, speaks to us of the need to purify ourselves from our sins, a first and indispensable step to walk on the path of holiness. This Gospel scene is considered in the fourth joyful mystery of the Rosary, which St. Josemaría taught us to contemplate by inviting us to “enter into” that episode in the life of Mary. Let us recall it here: after pointing to St. Luke’s narration, our Father wrote: “This time it will be you, my friend, who carries the cage with the doves. Just think: she—Mary Immaculate!— submits to the Law as if she were defiled.

“Through this example, foolish child, won’t you learn to obey the holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?

“Purification! You and I certainly do need purification. Atonement and, more than atonement, Love. Love as a searing iron to cauterize our soul’s uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretched tinder of our hearts.”⁷

More than twenty centuries have passed since the redemptive incarnation of the Son of God and, unfortunately, sin continues to be present in the world. Although Christ has conquered it by his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection, the application of his infinite merits also depends on our collaboration. Created in the image and likeness of God, each of us has to strive to make the merits of the Savior our own, collaborating with him in the work of Redemption. He especially expects that service from those who want to follow him closely in his Holy Church, the means and instrument of salvation for all mankind. Are you striving to uproot anything that could separate you from God? Do you foster each day an eagerness to attain a greater intimacy with our Lord?

“Experience of sin, then, should not make us doubt our mission. True, our sins can make it difficult to recognize Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realize that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight. ‘My grace is sufficient for you’ (2 Cor 12:9), our Lord replied to St. Paul, when he wanted to be freed of the ‘thorn in his flesh’ which humiliated him.

“The power of God is made manifest in our weakness and it spurs us on to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day. It renews itself over and over.”⁸

We will struggle effectively against sin and its consequences in our own lives if we go with true contrition to sacramental confession, with due frequency, and realizing that this sacrament of divine mercy was instituted by our Lord not only to forgive serious sins, but also to strengthen our soul at the hour of battle against the enemies of our sanctification. “Not so much despite our

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Fourth Joyful Mystery.

⁸ St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 114.

wretchedness but in some way through it, through our life as men of flesh and blood and dust, Christ is shown forth: in our effort to be better, to have a love which wants to be pure, to overcome our selfishness, to give ourselves fully to others—to turn our existence into a continuous service.”⁹

Some years ago, at the beginning of his pontificate, Benedict XVI put us on guard against a frequent temptation in the current atmosphere: that of thinking mistakenly “that the freedom to say no [to God], to descend into the shadows of sin and to want to do things on one's own is part of being truly human; that only then can we make the most of all the vastness and depth of our being men and women, of being truly ourselves; that we should put this freedom to the test, even in opposition to God, in order to become, in reality, fully ourselves. In a word, we think that evil is basically good, we think that we need it, at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being.”¹⁰

The falsehood of this reasoning (which sometimes could even be present in those who want to fulfill God's will) can clearly be seen simply by looking at the world around us. As the Holy Father insisted: “we can see that this is not so; in other words, that evil is always poisonous, does not uplift human beings but degrades and humiliates them. It does not make them any the greater, purer or wealthier, but harms and belittles them.”¹¹

In this context, the liturgical commemoration of our Lady of Lourdes that we will celebrate on the 11th has special significance. In that corner of the Pyrenees, after appearing many times to a young girl, asking her to pray and have others pray for sinners, our Lady proclaimed her identity: *I am the Immaculate Conception*. That is to say, the creature who, by a special divine privilege, in order to be the worthy Mother of God, was preserved free from original sin and from all stain of personal sin from the first moment of her conception. Let us beseech such a great Intercessor who looks upon us with mercy to pour forth on the world, so in need of redemption, the abundant graces that her Son has merited for us.

The effort to live always in God's grace does not distance Christians from mankind, their brothers and sisters. On the contrary, it makes them more sensitive to the spiritual and material needs of others. It gives them a big heart, with the capacity to feel compassion and give themselves for each and every person. Being near to God necessarily leads to being near to others, whether close or far away. “We see this in Mary. The fact that she is totally with God is the reason why she is so close to human beings. For this reason she can be the Mother of every consolation and every help, a Mother whom anyone can dare to address in any kind of need in weakness and in sin, for she has understanding for everything and is for everyone the open power of creative goodness.”¹²

These considerations can help us to take more and better advantage of the graces that—we trust—our Lady will gain for us in abundance also now, as the Marian year concludes. It will come to an end on the 14th, the anniversary of two interventions by God in the history of the Work: on the first of these, he showed St. Josemaría that Opus Dei was also for women; and on the second, he showed him how to incardinate the first priests of the Work. Let us prepare ourselves so that our

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2005.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

act of thanksgiving to God, for his mercies, may come from a *contrite and humble* heart,¹³ thoroughly purified by the fruitful reception of the sacrament of reconciliation. Let us follow St. Josemaría's advice: "Ask Jesus to grant you a Love like a purifying furnace, where your poor flesh—your poor heart—may be consumed and cleansed of all earthly miseries. Pray that it may be emptied of self and filled with him. Ask him to grant you a deep-seated aversion to all that is worldly so that you may be sustained only by Love."¹⁴

A number of anniversaries take place this month. On these dates, let us raise our hearts to God: *ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus!*, in a permanent act of thanksgiving. Realize that the Work, my daughter, my son, belongs to you, to each one of you.

The solemnity of St. Joseph is approaching, so deeply rooted in the Church and in Opus Dei. Following an old and new devotion, let us live with care the seven Sundays that Christian piety dedicates to preparing for this feast. I remember how our Father, upon refilling each year his pocket notebook, asked me to write in for him the sorrows and joys of the Holy Patriarch, so that he could meditate on them on each of those Sundays. It was a way of preparing himself better for the feast of the one who, with immense affection and gratitude, he called "my father and lord, whom I love so much."

I have "escaped," accompanied by all of you, to Brussels. There, close to our Father, I have seen how the Work is growing compact and secure; and I saw that it has to be that way, with the daily correspondence of each and every one, also because people are asking us from so many places to come: may it never be able to be said of any one of us that we shrug our shoulders in the face of this urgency.

Let us go to the intercession of Don Álvaro, who celebrated his saint's day on February 19 and carried out a daily apostolic plan. He was always concerned about all souls, and was spurred by this urgency when speaking with everyone he met.

Yesterday the Holy Father received me in an audience. I went there with all of you, and told him that, as our Father taught us, we want to see made a reality the aspiration *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!* That all mankind may go with Peter to Jesus through Mary! He told me that he is truly grateful for this help. He gave the blessing for all of us. Since he is counting on you and on me, let us spend our lives seconding his Magisterium, united to him and to his intentions. Let us love the Pope a lot!

Before ending these lines, I once again beseech you to keep all my intentions in mind, entrusting them in a special way to the Immaculate Virgin, *Mater Pulchrae Dilectionis*, Mother of Fairest Love.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

¹³ *Ps* 50[51]:19.

¹⁴ St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 814.

Rome, February 1, 2011